DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 291 090 CS 211 036

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TITLE A Focus on Revision: Some Teaching Strategies.
PUB DATE [87]
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Language Experience Approach; Peer Groups; *Revision (Written Composition); Teaching Methods; Writing (Composition); Writing Exercises; *Writing Improvement; *Writing Instruction; Writing Processes; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Writing Strategies

ABSTRACT

Revision, an essential component of the writing process, encompasses two basic elements: rewriting the content to assure clarity, and editing the draft to eliminate mechanical and grammatical errors. It is important for teachers to plan lessons directed specifically toward helping children make more sense of their messages. This document presents a number of strategies designed for teachers (1) to demonstrate to children the need for content revision; (2) to help children clarify the content of their writing; (3) to demonstrate to children the need for editing changes; and (4) to assist children in their editing efforts. The recommended strategy for demonstrating the need for revision presents a writing model that contains mistakes and allows students to suggest improvements. The strategies for teaching revision skills use the language experience approach, and emphasize peer interaction. (ARH)

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A Focus on Revision:

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A Focus on Revision: Some Teaching Strategies

When children relate events that have happened in their lives, they are inclined to assume that their listeners have background information and specific details that in fact are known only to the storytellers. The events, therefore, are often difficult to understand because of missing pieces. Listeners naturally ask questions of the speakers in order to clarify intent. Listeners are, in effect, assisting the speakers to revise their oral presentations, to make the stories more complete.

Revision is recognized as an important component of the writing process. Yet, according to Murray (1978), "...rewriting is one of the writing skills least researched, least examined, least understood, and usually, least taught" (p. 85). If children are asked to rewrite a story, they tend to concentrate on improving their penmanship first. Because children are so uncertain how to revise their drafts, later efforts are generally limited to proofreading--correcting spelling mistakes and punctuation errors (Belanger & Rodgers, 1983). When children do include more information, they are inclined to tack additional sentences to the end of their drafts without considering the sense of the entire piece (Calkins, 1980).

Revision encompasses two basic elements: rewriting the content to assure clarity, and editing the draft to eliminate mechanical and grammatical errors. Different teaching strategies are required for each of these aspects of revision. Because

teachers and children alike have a tendency to attend primarily to editorial changes, it is important for teachers to plan lessons directed specifically toward helping children to make more sense of their messages. This manuscript presents a number of strategies designed for teachers: 1) to demonstrate to children the need for content revision, 2) to help children clarify the content of their writing, 3) to demonstrate to children the need for editing changes, and 4) to assist children in their editing efforts. A commentary based on personal experience will provide a rationale for these suggestions.

Demonstrating the Need for Content Revision

Teachers should first provide a model in order to demonstrate to children the need to achieve greater clarity. One strategy is for the teacher to create a language experience story by soliciting comments from one group of children about an upcoming field trip or an event that has just taken place. These comments are recorded, exactly as spoken, onto chart paper. A second group of children can then be asked to read the chart. Experience suggests that the second group will have to ask questions in order to obtain a full understanding of the message on the chart. If a whole sentence is confusing, the teacher should seek clarification from the original group of children and prepare a new sentence on a strip of chart paper. The awkwardly written sentence is cut out and the revised sentence taped onto the chart in its place. Similarly, new sentences or phrases providing additional information are written on strips and taped on the chart in appropriate places. The revised chart will have

quite a patchwork appearance, but its message should be clear! The children will have received an introduction to the necessity for revision and will have been provided with the 'cut and paste' technique, a technique, incidentally, that is used in a number of word processing programs on personal computers.

A language experience exercise is also an appropriate strategy for demonstrating how to sequence events more logically. After a science experiment has been conducted, for example, the teacher can ask the children to recall what happened during the lesson. Each remark is written on a separate strip of chart paper. Children will recall important activities in the experiment, but probably not in a step by step sequence. The strips of paper are then reordered according to the correct sequence and taped together. A concise description should then result, one which could be placed in the science center to enable groups of children to replicate the experiment on their own.

Strategies for Content Clarification

In order to help children focus on content clarification in their own writing, the work in progress should be presented orally. This will prevent attention being fixed solely upon surface errors. Murray (1980) reasons that, "When students read their papers aloud they hear the voices of their classmates without the interference of mechanical problems, misspellings, and poor penmanship" (p. 15). A willing child reads his or her draft to the whole class. The rest of the class is invited to ask the speaker(writer) questions about the story. The children will naturally ask questions of the author in order to obtain a

fuller understanding. The teacher should make notes of these questions to help the child as he or she reworks the story. The teacher should also comment about interesting ideas in the story and ask questions to solicit more information, giving the writer confidence as well as direction. Russell (1983) has listed a variety of questions that teachers and children can ask to help writers clarify their messages.

During conferences, a teacher can also ask the child to read his draft aloud. Once again, it is extremely difficult for a teacher to concentrate upon the message when spelling and grammatical errors are obvious. Children will often recognize ways in which they are able to improve their own writing as they read their drafts aloud (Estabrook, 1982). The teacher or the child should note the areas requiring clarification.

The same procedure can then be carried out in small groups within the class. Many teachers find that groups of three children, heterogeneously arranged, facilitate these peer editing sessions. As the first child reads a draft, the two other children ask questions and make comments about the story. This procedure continues until all three children have had an opportunity to read their pieces and to exchange ideas. The teacher passes from group to group to oversee the operation, to model questions and to give suggestions as required. Graves (1983) has found that children become increasingly able to assist each other as they develop skills in talking about writing and in identifying specific problems. Time for rewriting should follow immediately in order to enable each child to incorporate

suggestions and alter the draft.

These same groups of children can also prepare collective stories, each group creating one piece of writing. The groups are paired and the same writing procedure is repeated. A member of the first group reads the draft aloud and children in the second group ask questions and make suggestions. Each group then works on revising its story.

Strip stories also encourage revision of story content. The child writes his/her story on strips of paper using a different strip for each sentence. Ideas are easily added or deleted; and the sequence is quickly adjusted. Tape holds the story in place once the writer is satisfied with the content and sequence.

Demonstrating the Need for Editing

Revision of mechanical and grammatical errors becomes necessary when children intend to "publish" their writing. Teachers can demonstrate editing skills by putting drafts, already rewritten to insure content clarification, onto transparancies. Teachers are advised to concentrate on one or two types of editing changes, such as punctuation or word usage, at each session.

When specific lessons in editing skills are required, the language experience exercise may once again be utilized. For example, a story can be prepared without punctuation and in lower case for children to correct. If too many children are prefacing every sentence with "and", another story overloaded with the target word can be written on a transparency. The class can then work on restructuring the sentences to present these in a more

mature form.

Strategies for Editing

The teacher can prepare a poster listing each editing point as it is discussed. Reminders, such as: "Have you included capital letters?" and "Is each sentence a complete thought?", will help children as they work on their drafts. Children can be shown some of the proofreading symbols used to mark surface errors--"sp" for misspellings or "P" for punctuation omissions (Temple, Nathan & Burris, 1982). Children should be encouraged to use double spacing in their drafts, so they can more easily cross out words, write in new words, expand ideas, and use arrows to move words or phrases from one location to another.

Following whole class presentations and individual or group conferences, children can now assist classmates with their editing problems. The poster of editing points will become a most useful tool as children review each other's drafts.

Through measures such as these, reasons Graves (1979), ..."the child realizes print is not indelible, does not have to be correct the first time, is a means toward a more permanent end" (p. 316). Graves assures teachers that, as a result, output will double and efforts to revise will increase ten times!

Commentary

The language experience approach is considered to be an ideal method for introducing reading to children. But its potential goes far beyond prereading lessons. Because the content of a language experience story is (very) familiar to the children, they are better able to concentrate on the revision

objectives of revision. Children come to see the need for revision gradually. Johnson (1981) claims, "It is through interaction with peers that children...develop the ability to view situations and problems from perspectives other than their own" (p. 6). When peer interaction for this purpose is encouraged, children will begin to move from their own egocentric writing modes, to produce more complete and detailed stories. Hink (1985) has found that children are more willing to revise their drafts when suggestions and comments have been made by their classmates. When group interaction sessions are held, each child will get more feedback than when the teacher tries to operate by himself or herself. Attending to the problems of other writers, children will become more effective writers themselves.

All writing efforts need not be revised to the point where these are perfect from every respect. Each child should be encouraged to keep all drafts in a file. Some of the best opportunities for revision occur when children return to stories they have written earlier in the year. Although they are often embarrassed by the immaturity of their earlier efforts, they will see all sorts of possibilities for change and improvement.

Conclusion

Teaching children to revise their writings, and teaching them to assist others through successive drafts, requires time and patience. As children become editors of their classmates' writings and become more willing to accept editorial help from others, they gradually learn to revise their own writings.

Although a number of strategies have been suggested for specific aspects of revision, the ultimate purpose is to help children develop strategies that will be of use to them during any stage of the writing process, and to enable them to write stories they are proud to call their own.

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